

9. The response of the Greeks to Paul's message.

Acts 17:32-34 When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later."³³ That ended Paul's discussion with them,³⁴ but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

10. Discussion: (a) Are you able to identify three different responses to Paul's message to the Athenians? (b) What is the wisest way for followers of Jesus to deal with each of those kinds of responses?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: *Blue* = New Testament *Red* = Words of Jesus
Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 23

1. Background: In lesson 22 we learned how Paul and Silas got into trouble in Thessalonica. The owner of a slave girl turned the city council against them when Paul cast out a demon who had been helping the girl tell fortunes. Later Paul and Silas were released from jail. Then the city council learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, so they apologized and sent them on their way.

2. Paul and Silas in Berea

Acts 17:10-15 That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea [a city in Macedonia (Northern Greece)]. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.¹¹ And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.¹² As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.

¹³ But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble.¹⁴ The believers acted at once, sending Paul on to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind.¹⁵ Those escorting Paul went with him all the way to Athens; then they returned to Berea with instructions for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him.

3. Discussion: (a) What can we learn from the people in Berea about how to verify whether new ideas are true? (b) What can we learn from the example of the new believers in Berea about how to respond to spiritual trouble makers?

4. Background Information: Originally *Epicurean* philosophers believed happiness was the highest good in life. By Paul's time, Epicureans had come to believe there was no higher good than sensual pleasure. Originally, *Stoic* philosophers stressed personal responsibility to live in harmony with nature. Stoic meant *seed picker*. By Paul's time stoics had evolved into *babblers*, expressing pride in their "bag" full of truths they had gathered from here and there.

5. Paul debates some of the Greek philosophers.

Acts 17:16-21 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city.¹⁷ He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

¹⁸ He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods."

¹⁹ Then they took him to the high council of the city. "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said.²⁰ "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about."²¹ (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

6. Discussion: (a) What can we learn from Paul's passion to enter into discussions with those who were led astray by popular false philosophies? (b) What are some popular ideas in our culture that we should be challenging? (c) How has the media become the market place of ideas today? (d) Can you think of any way we might use the media to open doors for sharing our faith?

7. Paul addresses the council in Athens.

Acts 17:22-31 So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way,²³ for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

²⁴ "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples,²⁵ and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.²⁶ From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

²⁷ "His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.²⁸ For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'²⁹ And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

³⁰ "God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him.³¹ For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

8. Discussion: (a) How did Paul explain the nature of God and his fairness toward all people, even those who are ignorant of the truth? (b) What can you learn from how Paul went about sharing his faith with those who did not understand salvation through Christ Jesus? (c) In what ways was Paul's approach to the Greek philosophers wise?